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RHDLCNE/COMUSNAVEUR LONDON UK
RUFNPKB/COMUSNAVEUR POLAD NAPLES IT
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TIRANA 000420

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STATE FOR EUR/SCE (MBENEDICT/DSAINZ)
NSC FOR BRAUN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MARR](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: ALBANIA: SCENESETTER FOR VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY'S
MAY 7 A-3 MEETING IN DUBROVNIK

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARCIE RIES. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Background/Summary: Albanians describe their relationship with the U.S. as "strategic" and consider it their most important bar none. Politically, and militarily Albania looks to the U.S. first, and is deeply appreciative of our help. In return, Albanians have worked hard to make themselves a country upon which the U.S. can rely. With virtually no hesitation, Albania was among the first to sign an Article 98 agreement (despite pressure from Europeans), and send troops to Iraq (now 120 commandos). It also has troops in Afghanistan and Bosnia. This winter, when we were having difficulty finding a venue for the Iraq coalition planning meeting, Albania stepped forward and did a very good job of hosting Generals Abizaid and Casey and representatives from the 30 participating states. Albania's moderate voice in the region has helped keep the lid on extremist groups and smooth the way for negotiations on Kosovo's final status. Equally important, Albania has taken a lead role within the A-3 for improving cooperation among the three countries. Under Albania's chairmanship of the A-3 and SEEBRIG, both a medical contingent (A3) and larger joint staff South East Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG) headquarters were established and deployed in Afghanistan.

¶2. (C) Integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, beginning with a NATO invitation in 2008, is the country's highest international priority, but there is much work to be done. Albania lags behind Macedonia and Croatia in almost every measure save one: unlike the other two, Albania harbors nearly universal support for NATO membership. Getting there might not be easy, but once there the Alliance will find no other more enthusiastic member. During your meeting, you may want to:

-- express appreciation for Albania's contributions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bosnia, and ask that Albania continue to be a voice of moderation in the region;

-- urge continued reforms, particularly in the area of rule of law and supporting MOD Mediu's reform program, in order to meet NATO requirements; and

-- show support for Albania's NATO aspirations and continued participation within the A-3, but remain noncommittal concerning the next enlargement round, stressing the need to meet membership standards. End Background/Summary.

GOOD ALLY GLOBALLY AND REGIONALLY

13. (C) Your meeting with PM Berisha offers an excellent opportunity to express appreciation to the leader of a country that has consistently shown itself a friend of the United States. Over the years Albanian leaders have consistently looked to us for advice on how to make their country a better partner internationally and pursue effective domestic reform. In return, Albania has rarely failed to answer our call on key issues -- Article 98, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Albania has also taken a leading role in the Adriatic Charter and used its chairmanship to negotiate and secure the deployment of an A-3 medical contingent to Afghanistan. As chair of the South East Europe Defense Ministerial (SEEDM), Albania took responsibility for establishing the South East Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG) joint staff headquarters in Afghanistan, no small feat for a country with extremely resources. In the context of the Kosovo status negotiations, Prime Minister Berisha pledged to Ambassador Wisner he would press the Kosovars to make concrete progress on treatment of the Serb minority and would work hard to dispel the idea that Albanians harbored the ambition to construct a Greater Albania.

NATO MEMBERSHIP: WORK TO BE DONE

14. (C) Albania has no higher international priority than Euro-Atlantic integration, beginning with NATO membership.

TIRANA 00000420 002 OF 002

Albanian leaders understand that while we share their NATO aspirations, there is still a lot of work to be done to meet NATO requirements. In Minister of Defense Mediu, we have a bright, resourceful, and hardworking interlocutor who is committed to making the reforms that are necessary. However Ambassador Nuland told the Prime Minister when she was here that the NATO Council is likely to look most at progress on rule of law issues. The Prime Minister will need to lead on this, budgetary issues and on holding local elections that meet international standards in 2007 if Albania is to have a chance of getting an invitation in 2008.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

15. (C) Interest of American business in Albania, up to now very modest, is increasing. The previous government finalized a contract with Lockheed Martin to upgrade air traffic control/communications worth USD 47 million, and the new government is working on an agreement with Lockheed to provide a USD 17 million coastal surveillance system. New, very ambitious projects in the energy sector are under discussion.

THE PRIME MINISTER

16. (C) Prime Minister Berisha has a troubled history with the United States, having failed to heed clear warnings that the pyramid schemes would bring about the collapse of the economy and ultimately all of the institutions of government, in 1997 when he was President. He is working hard now to demonstrate that he is the most reliable of partners, especially on foreign policy issues of critical importance to the United States. His domestic program, which focus on fighting organized crime -- where he has had some significant successes -- and corruption is a worthy one. The MCC has recognized his commitment to these goals by making Albania a recipient of an award as a "threshold" country.

MESSAGES

17. (C) You may wish to make the following points with your Albanian interlocutors:

-- Thank you for supporting U.S. initiatives, both regionally and globally. I know that your soldiers are serving with distinction with U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we are deeply grateful. (Note: PM Berisha visited his troops in Iraq in December 2005.)

-- We appreciate Albania's moderating role in the Balkans. Your close ties in the region and support for a peaceful, internationally brokered resolution of Kosovo status is crucial. I know you have been active in pressing the Kosovars to do more for their minorities and I urge you to continue this helpful role.

-- We fully support Albania's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and are pleased by the high level of support for NATO membership among the Albanian people.

-- Albania must work hard if it is to be invited into NATO in the next enlargement round. Military reform is essential and good that you have pledged to meet the 2% GNP target but you will need to show concrete progress, especially on rule of law issues, to persuade the North Atlantic Council.

-- Congratulations on Albania's recent signing of a Millennium Challenge Threshold Program agreement. I urge you to make the best use of these funds to eliminate public sector (grant focuses on taxation, business licensing and public procurement) corruption.

RIES